

September 29, 2015

Written testimony on HB 4206 and HB 4691 by Jennifer Canvasser, Founder and Director of the NEC Society

In January of 2012 my twin sons, Micah and Zachary, were born three months prematurely at the University of Michigan C.S. Mott Children's Hospital. They weighed just over two pounds each and were at risk of a host of life threatening conditions, including necrotizing enterocolitis (NEC). NEC is an intestinal disease with a severely high morbidity and mortality rate, and is a leading cause of overall infant death in the United States. NEC claims the lives of about 500 infants and affects thousands more each year in the U.S. Furthermore, the cost to care for and treat infants with NEC ranges from thousands to millions of dollars per baby.

Tragically, my son Micah developed NEC when he was six weeks old, and died from complications related to the disease when he was 11 months old. In honor of my son Micah, and in hope of preventing NEC from affecting more babies, I founded the NEC Society, a non-profit organization dedicated to reducing the incidence of NEC in fragile infants.

One of the most effective ways to prevent NEC is through an exclusive human milk diet. Human breast milk can reduce the risks of NEC by nearly 80%, while bovine-based formula significantly increases the risk. Human milk is literally lifesaving for fragile and premature infants.

It is critical for all fragile infants to have access to human milk. If mother's own milk is unavailable, which it often is because these mothers have given birth so prematurely and are facing significant obstacles, fragile infants need access to donor milk.

It is critical that donor milk for fragile infants be accessible, safe, and equally distributed. The sale of breast milk over the internet threatens each of the above, as less human milk is donated to milk banks serving fragile infants in the neonatal intensive care unit. Similarly, for-profit entities may threaten the accessibility and equal distribution of human milk for fragile infants as the lifesaving milk is sold at a high price and only available to institutions with a significant amount of financial resources.

Accordingly, as the founder and director of the NEC Society, and as a mother of an infant who died from necrotizing enterocolitis – a disease that can be prevented through the use of human milk – I urge you to support and pass HB 4206 and HB 4691.

If you have questions or would like further information, please contact me anytime:
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